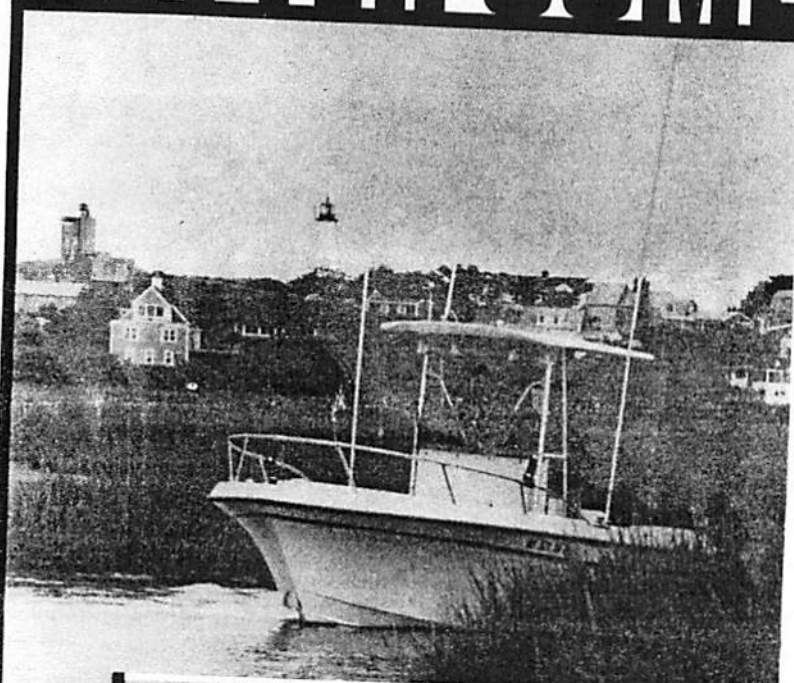


DUXBURY BAY

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BETTER COME



AT
HIGH
TIDE

DISCOVERING DUXBURY BAY

Great beaches. Superb fishing. Fine scenery. A convenient central New England location midway between Boston and Cape Cod. Excellent boating facilities. The most historic waterfront on the continent. This spacious, yet protected bay is an ideal cruising destination or trailerboat daytripping spot. Except for one thing: Half of the time, there's almost no water there. But don't let that discourage you. During the six hours of high water, you can't find a better spot to do all the things you ever wanted to do on protected saltwater. And when the water disappears there's plenty to do and see ashore. Or you can pull up to the nearest sandbar (if you and your boat aren't already sitting in the middle of one) and go for a swim, or have a cookout and grill the bluefish you caught earlier, or go sandbar coaming or tidepool wading with your kids. In fact, the thin water and abundant sand have a lot to do with what makes Duxbury Bay so much fun to visit.

Before you go there, you might want to equip yourself with a few things: a watch and a tide table, to make sure there's water in the Bay when you get there; a chart with which to navigate the Bay's tentacle-like channels, broad shallows and occasional rocks—in case you forgot to consult the tide tables and arrived at low water; or in case you just like exploring narrow channels and cruising bathtub-depth water, but like to know in advance which is which.

ABOVE LEFT: More boat than water — Jack Kent drifts his 20' Grady-White Fisherman down the creek behind Gurnet Light on an outgoing tide.

MIDDLE LEFT: Picturesque and uncrowded spots make Duxbury Bay worth exploring.

LOWER LEFT: All those rods and outriggers aren't just for show — fishing in the bay is very good.

In any case, make sure your chart is up to date, and bring a lead line or leave your fathometer on just to be sure; the Bay's channels shift constantly. The buoys may not be all that accurate, either, particularly in early spring before they've been repositioned for the season. And if you sail, be prepared to make use of auxiliary power if you come at low tide. When faced with a several-mile run up a long narrow channel against the current, tacking is out of the question.

Or leave all that stuff at home and equip yourself with the best local knowledge you can find. A harbormaster or marina operator will do in a pinch. But if you really want to go first class, find yourself an amphibious kid who has spent every one of his or her fifteen-or-so summers in and on the Bay.

Most of the time these kids are out on the water somewhere, but if you're lucky you may run into some of them at a gas dock, refueling their boats or their stomachs, washing the sand and fish scales out of their cockpits, or just hanging out between excursions. Their responses to a few well-chosen questions can be worth more than the wisdom of the *Cruising Guide*, the *Waterway Guide*, and the *Coast Pilot* combined.

If you're really lucky, the kid you run into will be equipped with a first class boat like a 20' Grady-White Fisherman fitted with everything from a video fishfinder to a four-speaker stereo. He'll offer to take you out on the Bay for the afternoon, just for the hell of it. If you're really lucky, the kid you'll run into is Jack Kent III.

Jack Kent III is the son of Jack Kent, Jr. (of course), owner of Bayside Marine, one of three marinas in town. (If you are cruising, you might like to know that there is a Yacht Club with some guest moorings, a town landing, and a conven-

niently located grocery store as well.) If you think that my chances of running into Jack at Bayside's gas dock on a beautiful summer afternoon were artificially enhanced, you're right. A call to Jack, Jr., asking if he knew of anyone who could take a writer and a photographer for a spin around the Bay had a lot to do with it.

I also had been looking for an excuse to go for a ride on a legendary Grady-White Fisherman for a long time, and I had figured that the folks at Bayside Marine—a major Grady-White dealer—could help me out. They sure could. Kent's boat has just about every option there is, except for power steering. Not that Kent is complaining, mind you. How many eighth graders do you know who have \$25,000 floating at a mooring?

Having a mooring, even without a boat to put on it, is somewhat of an accomplishment in Duxbury. Matt Delaney, who took the photos that accompany this article, once inquired about the procedure for placing new moorings in the harbor. "Walk out at low tide, drop it where you want it, then come back and tell me where it is," said the town's Harbormaster. Kent says that there is currently a five-year wait for a deep-water mooring in Duxbury. And that's only if you call five feet or so—the depth of the dredged channel and turning basin in front of Bayside Marine and the Duxbury Yacht Club—"deep water."

But given the state of the tide, we ignored the channel buoys and headed straight south out of the basin, skirting the Duxbury shore. Our aim was to take a leisurely, counterclockwise tour of the expanse of water that stretches from Duxbury south to Plymouth. This bay, enclosed and protected by the long arms of Duxbury and Plymouth beaches, is actually three bodies of water, each named for the town that controls its.

by Dan Weeks



shoreline: Duxbury Bay, Kingston Bay and Plymouth Harbor.

As we would for most of the afternoon, we ran over ground that showed solid green on the chart, ambling along with the digital depthsounder and the digital speedometer both reading about 4.

The shoreline of all three bays is part beach, part marsh and part woods, and is almost entirely private. Large, attractive houses on large, well-groomed acreages provided an attractive parade of architectural and landscaping styles to look at as we cruised toward South Duxbury and on down the Standish Shore.

Duxbury claims to have been New England's first summer resort. It is still among the classiest and, given the size of the lots and the value of the land, the

Duxbury shoreline is not expected to change very much.

But with enough money, anything is possible—a fact that someone is now proving by building a mega-mansion halfway between Duxbury and Goose Point. The owner is reputed to be a beer magnate, and the mansion is reputed to be costing him \$8,000,000. It will have everything, including an indoor/outdoor pool.

Ironically, the mansion is being built within yards of one of Duxbury Bay's few public access points, a road which dead-ends at a marsh and a beach. On this weekday afternoon, the beach was populated (though hardly crowded) with mothers and children, while teenagers windsurfed from the firm and grassy surface of the marsh.

Interestingly enough, Jack reports that there is sentiment in the town

against both the public access and the mansion—two waterfront uses that seem light years apart—on the grounds that both endanger the marsh. The mansion is built too close to the marsh, some say, and the windsurfers and swimmers erode the grassland by walking and dragging their boards across it. Jack says the wakes of increasing numbers of fast ski boats don't help matters, either—another reason for keeping to No Wake speed this close to shore.

Perhaps the best public access to Duxbury Bay is by private boat. The Bay's dozen-or-so square miles of water offer enough boating room for everybody. And at low tide there are enough hard-sand flats for sunbathing and sandcastle building and enough protected water for swimming that you can always find a spot with plenty of room. According to Jack, Captain's flat, the rectangular block of green just off Goose Point, is a favorite place to deliberately ground out and spend a low-tide afternoon at the beach.

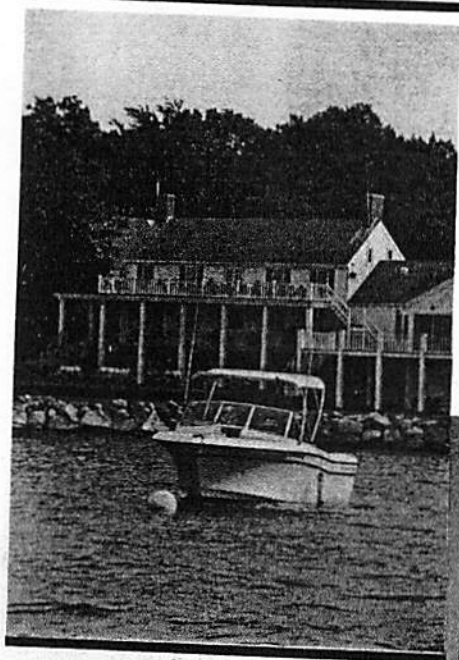
Rounding Goose Point I noticed a fleet of small boats anchored behind Captain's Hill in a place where the chart showed no water. I asked Jack about this.

"Yeah, that place is marked on the chart as The Nook, but most people around here call it Howland's Landing. There's water there all the time in spite of what the chart says. It's an unmarked hole; there are lots of them around the Bay. The sand shifts so fast the charts can't keep up with the changes. There's even a channel that's not on the chart. If you line up the Standish Monument on Captain's Hill with the Powerplant, you can run all the way into Plymouth at dead low water with six feet under you. At least you could a while ago; I haven't tried it recently."

We had spent so much time puttering along the shore that I thought we'd better speed things up a little bit.

Jack was glad to oblige, and so was the Grady-White, which hit 35 mph from a dead walk in what seemed like less time than it takes to read this sentence. With the Johnson 120 wide open, we flew across Kingston Bay's Ichabods Flat at a digitally-read-out altitude of 4.6 feet, a reading which occasionally dove in a blur of numbers quickly into twin digits and then back out again as we crossed channels, marked and unmarked.

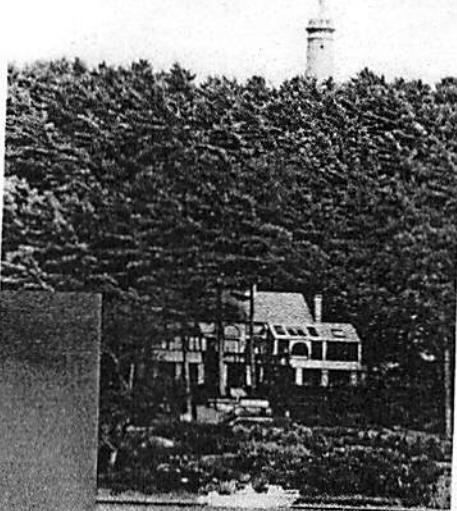
It made me a bit nervous, actually—4.6 feet, 35 mph. And, according to the chart (which, admittedly, I had less and less faith in as the day progressed), there was a smattering of rock about. I really began to get jittery when Matt Delaney started taking full-throttle por-



LEFT: Plymouth Yacht Club's established looking clubhouse fits right into the local architecture.

RIGHT: One of Miles Standish's new neighbors. Judging from the architecture and landscaping, most of them do not live lives of puritanical poverty and simplicity.

ALL PHOTO'S BY MATTHEW DELANY



traits of our skipper while hanging from the T-top, completely obstructing Jack's forward view.

But Jack knew what he was doing. We skirted Billington Ledge, then zoomed in for a closer look at a fishing vessel tied up at the Cordage, an historic rope-factory turned shopping mall, then gunned past High Cliff, across Goose Point Channel, around the breakwaters and into Plymouth Harbor.

Throughout the afternoon, the Bay had been a very peaceful place to be. We had seen the bathers and the windsurfers. We had seen locals daysailing in their catboats, plowing up the Bay in the brisk afternoon breeze. The stretch of water between Duxbury and Plymouth is probably the best place on the New England coast to see these big, beamy, craft—the original New England-designed shoal draft sailboats—in their native habitat. Cat owners love these big, roomy boats for their ability to take them big-boat sailing in water too shallow for many smaller boats to venture.

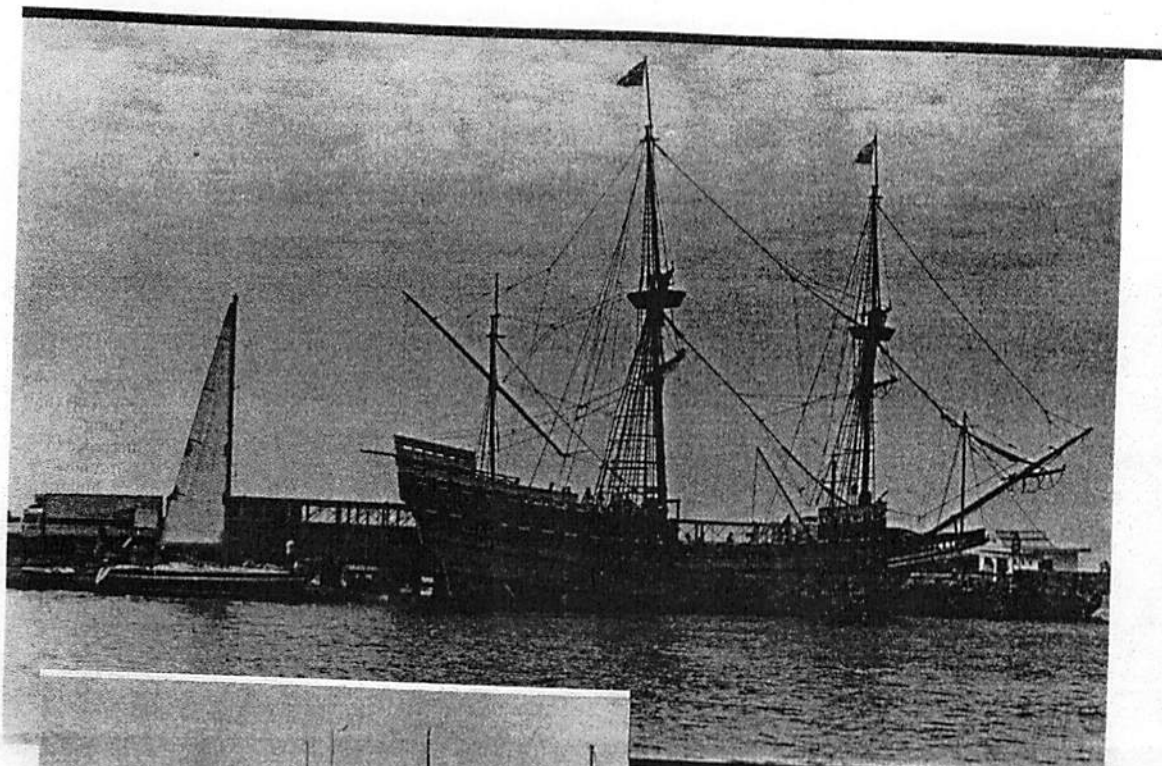
And we had seen a few other fishing machines like ours, scouting blues in the harbor or heading out to Browns Bank to try their luck there. Fishing, incidentally, is excellent here; Jack reports catching bluefish right off the Bayside Marine Gas Dock, or chasing them right up into Bluefish River at the head of the



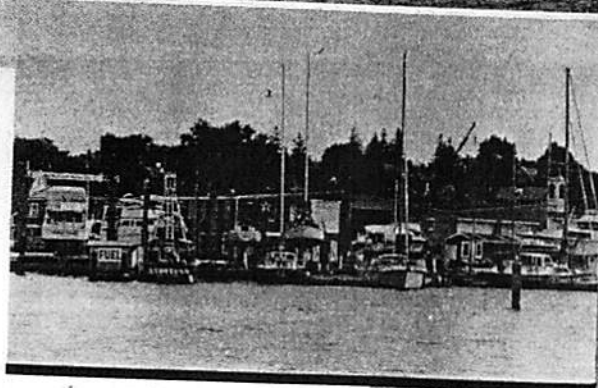
ABOVE: Howland's Landing. There's water here, in spite of what the chart says. Maybe not much water, though—this 15' West Wight Potter will probably float on a heavy dew.

RIGHT: Bug Light on Duxbury Pier. When this longtime landmark was slated to be replaced with a modern structure, locals raised money for its preservation.



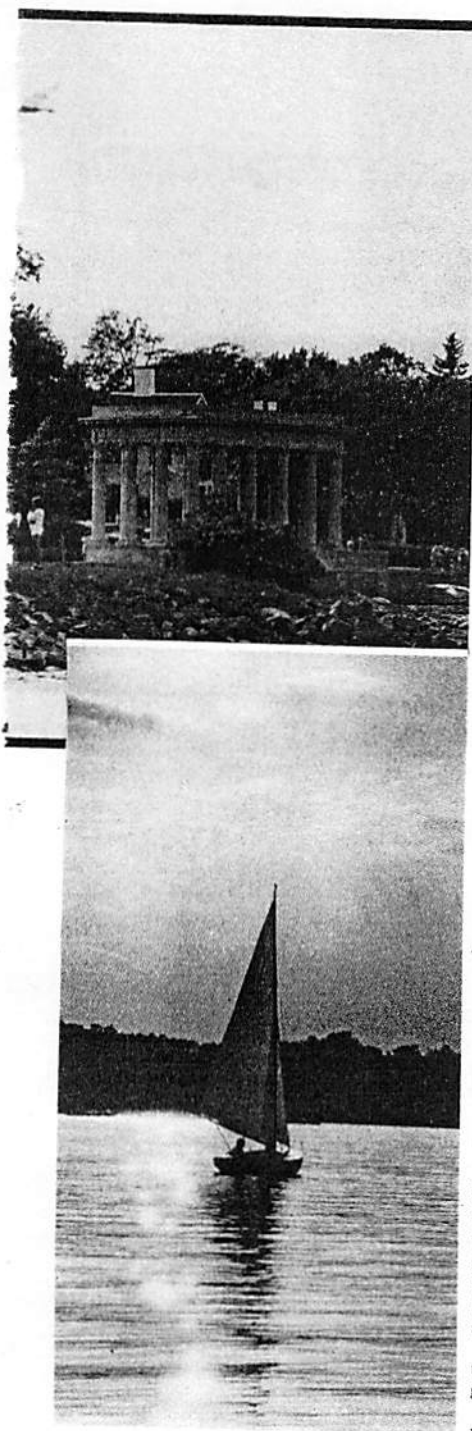


ABOVE RIGHT: Somewhere within that great, granite edifice is The Rock.
 LOWER RIGHT: Heading home from a sunset cruise — Small boat sailing at its best.



ABOVE: A big famous sailboat perpetually docked in Plymouth harbor. How would you like to sail this into Plymouth Channel without an auxiliary?
 MIDDLE: Tall rigs and tuna lowers — Plymouth Marine, where Duxbury Bay's big boats hang out.
 RIGHT: Working man's Plymouth. The Harbormaster's office in is the center.





Bay. And although his Grady-White is clearly built and equipped to handle offshore fishing should he get the urge, he has all the action he can handle within five miles of his mooring, and rarely ventures far. He says he and a friend reeled in more than 500 pounds of fish one day, most of which he released. Although he's got enough built-in coolers to really load the boat down with fish, he only keeps what he can eat.

But once around the breakwaters and into Plymouth Harbor, it was an entirely different scene. Aside from its popularity with land-bound tourists and history buffs, Plymouth is the only deep-water, sheltered anchorage between Scituate and the Cape Cod Canal. This means that people cruising the coast are apt to drop in, and that large commercial and party-boat fishing vessels call the place a homeport as well.

The Harbor is crammed with boats of all descriptions (including, of course, the MAYFLOWER replica and its shallop). In fact, the density and number of craft here are almost enough to make you think you've taken a wrong turn at Boston Light and ended up in Marblehead instead of on the South Shore. As at Duxbury, all kinds of facilities and services are available here. If company almost to the point of crowding doesn't bother you, you'll enjoy it here, for there's plenty to see and do. Check with the Harbormaster (located at the fish pier at the north end of the harbor) if you plan to stay long; some guest moorings may be available.

There's plenty to explore in the harbor—enough to keep any bunch of kids with a dinghy occupied for days. There are the fishing piers to scout out, the boats in the harbor to look over, the Plymouth Yacht Club's dinghy racing fleet to watch (they often practice out by the tip of the breakwater), and some impressive looking, full-dress, tuna-killing sportfishing rigs in the slips in front of Plymouth Marine.

Ashore, of course, there's the MAYFLOWER, the Rock, and the Pilgrim Hall Museum. Plymouth Plantation, a living-history-type museum, is a short taxi ride south of town.

Continuing our cruise around the circumference of the Bay, we ran along the inside of Plymouth Beach, then to Bug Light. This old lighthouse, marked Duxbury Pier on the chart, was scheduled to be replaced with a more modern fixture, but locals have been trying to raise enough money to restore and preserve the old landmark instead.

Although it can get pretty choppy in the vicinity of the Light, it can also be a good place to catch stripers, says Jack.

Amazingly enough, given the speed potential of our boat and the modest dis-

tance covered, we had spent three hours on the water before we drew even with the Bay's entrance. Even so, I felt as though we were rushing things a bit. There is simply so much to see here. With the sun getting low in the sky, we ran between Clarks Island and the long arm of Saquish Neck. Clarks Island is privately owned, with a dozen or so estate-like houses on it.

Clarks is a wealthy and tightly knit community. Rumor has it that residents chipped in to build a barge to ship a ton of alcohol over to the island to fuel the festivities for a recent wedding. Two large boats were chartered to bring guests to the island, one of which ran aground on the way there. Another boat was summoned to pull the boat off the bar, which it succeeded in doing.

Unfortunately, it also succeeded in pulling the transom of the grounded vessel off as well. The quick-thinking charter skipper slammed the throttles to the wall and made for Plymouth Marine. He arrived just in time to allow his boat to sink into the slings of a waiting lift, while the wedding-guest passengers all climbed onto the cabin roof so as not to get their wing tips and long dresses wet. Or so the story goes.

But the island is good for more than just Gatsby-style weddings and generating local legend; one of the best anchorages in the Bay is just to the north of the island. Other anchorages are between Bug Light and Saquish Head (although this can be a bit rolly with partyboat wakes), inside The Nummet (a bar due west of the light) and about a mile or so due east of Duxbury in Two Rock Channel. For those of you who are more concerned with launching ramps than holding ground, you'll find an excellent one (concrete surface, no fee, plenty of free parking) in Plymouth Harbor, near the town pier off Water Street.

Some of the best gunkholing we did all afternoon was when Kent ran us up the winding creek through the salt marsh behind Gurnet Point. By then the sun was beginning to set and the water was beginning to get thin again, so we headed out of the creek, throttled up and ran back to Bayside as the sun set behind the Standish Monument.

It was a long afternoon, but the visit seemed all too short. Sooner or later I'm going to hitch up my little 14-footer and spend the day down there. I can think of so many things to do—look for sand dollars at low tide, cruise way up the creek to the road and explore Gurnet Point, walk the seaward side of Duxbury Beach.

Perhaps this weekend would be a good time, before it gets too cool.

Where are my tide tables, anyway? ■